

Good Morning Chairman Scott and members of the House Education Committee.

My name is Ed Clements and I am a high school teacher from Bay City, Michigan. I motivate 9th-12th graders in business, technology, social studies, and biology. I have been a teacher for 13 years, I am a highly skilled, trained professional, and I know what I am doing. My experience in the classroom allows me to mentor younger teachers, and help them become successful educators. I hold three college degrees including a Masters, four teaching certifications, and I have real-world business experience in marketing and sales, as well as owning and operating a small business as a sole proprietor. I am an asset to my school district and community. I am proud of my students, my profession, and my colleagues. I am horrified at the direction being taken by a majority of the House of Representatives on education. The current direction being pursued does nothing to improve education, does nothing to create jobs, and is nothing more than an attack on teachers and the middle class.

I am here before you today to testify against House Bills 4625-4628. Teacher tenure is not a guaranteed job for life, it protects due process. I do not support ineffective teachers, nor do any of my colleagues. I do support streamlining the process to discharge ineffective tenured teachers, with a goal of reducing the time and expense of the current process. "Ineffectiveness" must be proven through use of fair, impartial processes and standards, including locally-negotiated evaluation systems based on multiple measures (as provided for in the MDE-endorsed "Michigan Framework for Teacher Evaluations").

House Bill 4625 is an attack on public school teachers, and our ability to do our jobs effectively. This bill does nothing to improve the tenure process, or the education of our children. Increasing the probationary period from 4 to 5 years will not improve teacher effectiveness. Probationary teachers can already be dismissed at any time. The bill unfairly dismisses a teacher after two unsatisfactory evaluations; but requires three consecutive satisfactory evaluations to remain employed. This bill undermines the collaborative collective bargaining process that teachers and school districts currently engage in to determine evaluation systems. House Bill 4625 takes away input from teachers in creating evaluation systems; giving a school board the sole authority to craft evaluation systems does not make any sense. Teachers in the classroom need to be a part of the evaluation system to maintain a fair and equitable environment. Taking away the teachers input on evaluations is unfair and unjust.

Tenure is important to keep good teachers in the classroom, and shield them from being discharged due to political or personality conflicts. As a classroom teacher I have several supervisors and am accountable to all of them; including the district superintendent, building principal, assistant principals, and most importantly parents and the community. Tenure protects my due process rights, protects me from being terminated unjustly, or punished unfairly. Amending tenure using House Bill 4625 will create numerous wrongful discharge lawsuits and ultimately increase costs on local school districts.

House Bill 4626 allowing a teacher to be suspended 20 days pay or reduced compensation equivalent of 40 days pay without recourse is outrageous, and may prove to be illegal. This bill could destroy people's lives; the thought that I could be suspended without pay for 20 days without any recourse on false allegations is reprehensible.

House Bill 4627 is the most troubling of this package of bills. Eliminating seniority in the layoff and recall process will create a system of retention that is grossly unfair. What safeguards will be in place to ensure that the prettiest teacher in the building is not given preferential treatment in a layoff? What safeguards will be in place to ensure that teachers are not laid off or recalled based on salary? What safeguards will be in place to ensure that teachers are not retained solely on the basis of coaching a sport or directing the band? What safeguards will be in place to ensure that the superintendent's son or daughter that is a teacher in the district is not given preferential treatment? I don't see any safeguards in this bill that maintain a fair and equitable layoff and recall procedure.

This bill will allow school districts to balance their budgets by retaining lower salaried younger employees; and it will ultimately harm the education system by getting rid of higher salaried more experienced teachers. Teachers that have been in the classroom for years, that know what they are doing, have learned from mistakes, mentor younger teachers, and know what is best for kids. This bill will create a popularity contest layoff and recall system; that will ultimately take some of the best teachers out of classrooms. Seniority is the only fair way to administrate layoffs and recalls; if there is a way that is fairer, I would like to see it.

House Bill 4627 also institutes a placement policy for teachers based on mutual consent of the principal and teacher. What safeguards will be in place to ensure that school districts or principals do not withhold positions to keep teachers from working due to personality or political differences? If the teacher and principal cannot reach mutual consent within 30 days the teacher is placed on unpaid leave. This bill is going to potentially ruin the career of a teacher due to a personality conflict. Once again this is an ill conceived piece of legislation, and may well be illegal.

House Bill 4628 effectively strips collective bargaining from public school employees. Collective bargaining ensures the best learning environment for our children, when administration and teachers work together the best laid plans come forth. We do not need more intervention from Lansing; leave school district policies to be bargained at the local level so that the best outcome is achieved. This bill will effectively end 70 years of laws and ultimately undermine civil rights. Leave school issues to those that know best, the school employees, the people that work in the schools every day. House Bill 4628 much like 4627 will create an unfair workplace environment and ultimately hurt the education of our children. Teachers know what is best for students; to take them out of the process is not going to improve education. This bill will take the best teachers out of the classroom. How does this bill improve education? How does this bill create jobs or attract the best and the brightest to be teachers? This bill is once again ill conceived and bad for our children.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ed Clements